



Re-defining the Japan-US Relationship

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I. Re-defining the Japan-US Relationship

- Executive Summary and Recommendations -

The Beginning of CULCON

In June of 1961, President John F. Kennedy and Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda met to assess the state of the Japan-US relationship. There was reason for both leaders to be worried. When President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Kishi had revised the US-Japan Security Treaty the year before, there were massive protests in the streets of Tokyo which forced Eisenhower to cancel his planned visit to Japan to celebrate the new agreement. The US military occupation of Japan had ended less than a decade before and US troops still controlled the island of Okinawa. Most Americans and Japanese retained vivid images of their brutal war in the Pacific, including President Kennedy who had himself barely escaped death when a Japanese destroyer sliced his PT boat in half.

The American and Japanese people were also uncertain of their futures. Americans were worried that the Soviet Union was outpacing the West after Sputnik and a reported “missile gap.” Japanese were still receiving development assistance from the United States and the World Bank. Kennedy and Ikeda came to office with bold visions to restore the confidence of their people. Kennedy famously declared that the “torch has been passed to a new generation” and promised to land a man on the moon by 1969. Ikeda pledged that he would double Japan’s national income in a decade and showcase Japan’s renewed confidence at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

Both leaders knew that their visions depended on a strong Japan-US relationship, but worried that the alliance had no moorings among the Japanese and American people. Public officials understood the threats posed by the Soviet Union and the opportunities presented by closer bilateral economic cooperation, but the people did not know each other.

In their joint statement, Kennedy and Ikeda agreed to establish three new joint committees to look at ways to strengthen the foundations of the bilateral relationship. One would look at trade and economic affairs, and a second at scientific and technological cooperation. The third would “study expanded cultural and educational cooperation between the two countries.”¹ This committee would come to be known as the US-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange, or “CULCON” for short.

Through CULCON, leaders in business, education and the arts from both nations worked with officials from the two governments to identify opportunities to expand the cultural and education linkages between the United States and Japan. They contributed to the partnerships of universities and libraries in the two nations, the exchange of students and artists of national and local repute, and the study of the United States in Japan and Japan in the United States. As the two nations’ security relationship matured and the economies became increasingly intertwined, the educational and cultural linkages across the Pacific expanded organically at all

¹ John F. Kennedy Presidential Papers. Joint Statement Following Discussions with Prime Minister Ikeda of Japan. June 22, 1961

levels. CULCON continued to deliberate on ways to keep the connection between the two peoples strong, but the original mission had largely been fulfilled. Citizens in the two countries had come to know each other much better.

A Fresh Look

Recognizing the changes in global circumstances/ environment that have taken place since its inception, the members of the committee, as CULCON approaches its 50th anniversary, decided to take a fresh and comprehensive look at the role of cultural and education affairs in the overall Japan-US relationship and the proper role for CULCON in the future.

That there is inherent value in culture and education is beyond dispute, but the significance of cultural and educational affairs between nations has to be measured in part against the larger political and economic context of the relationship. In the years since Kennedy and Ikeda met, the Japan-US relationship has undergone a remarkable transformation, but one premised on the original understanding that our alliance based on our shared democratic tradition, was indispensable to both nations' security and prosperity. Today the United States and Japan are the first and second largest economies in the world. Massive Japanese foreign direct investment into the United States after the appreciation of the yen in the 1980s initially caused alarm for some Americans, but today thousands of people in every State of the Union are employed by Japanese companies and consider them a valued member of their communities. US foreign direct investment into Japan was always a much smaller fraction of the flow into the American economy from Japan, but that number has also increased and in 2006 American companies quietly made four times more profit from their investments in Japan than they did in China.

On the political and security fronts the changes have been equally stunning. Ikeda and Kennedy had to refer to the Japan-US relationship as a "partnership" in their joint statement because the word "alliance" was considered too sensitive in Japan. Nevertheless, the Japanese public has supported the dispatch of self-defense forces abroad to provide logistical support in the Indian Ocean in the war against terrorism and humanitarian reconstruction in Iraq. In the G-8, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, and the Six Party Talks on North Korea, American and Japanese diplomats coordinate strategies to enhance peace and prosperity for Asia and the world. In recent polls 92% of the American policy community said that they have confidence in Japan as a "trustworthy" ally.

Yet even as the Japan-US relationship has become closer in all aspects, the world around the two nations has been changing at an even faster pace. Globalization has created new opportunities for entrepreneurship unimaginable five decades ago, but it has also caused anxieties for workers in developed and developing countries who are uncertain of their own place in the new economy. The rise of Chinese economic power has lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty and contributed to the integration of Asia, but also raised new challenges for the United States and Japan not only in terms of shifting balance of powers, but with respect to such matters as the environment, energy, food safety and transparency.

Climate change now dominates the discourse of American and Japanese political leaders, but the multi-generational dimension of the challenge and the paucity of effective mechanisms for international cooperation have delayed concrete action. The gap between rich and poor

around the world is growing, and the international food supply has suddenly and unexpectedly come under stress, yet foreign aid practices by the developed countries remain little changed and governments are working toward conclusion of a successful Doha Development Round of trade talks. The catastrophic human tragedies wrought by the recent earthquake in China and the cyclone in Myanmar have brought into sharp relief the plight of masses of vulnerable people in these and other parts of the world. None of these challenges can be dealt with in a piece-meal fashion; they are causally interlinked and call for concerted actions by the global community.

Nor can any of these problems be resolved by the United States or Japan alone on the one hand, nor by the international community without joint leadership between the United States and Japan. Yet in spite of the enormous strides made in the Japan-US alliance and the general consensus that the relationship has never been stronger, the reality is that the American and Japanese people are both once again uncertain of themselves in one important area: the effectiveness of their capacity for persuasion through their ideas and values. This is where CULCON can play an important catalytic role.

For Japan, having achieved its post war aim to catch up with the US in terms of its economic activities, it is now in a period of transition. It is deregulating and moving towards a small government. It is in the process of redefining its objectives within the changing global context. Inevitably, during such a period of change, there is some uncertainty and loss of direction. Japanese intellectuals and thought leaders have been less visible in the great debates of the age than they were in more dynamic economic times. Japanese students are less ambitious than they once were about studying abroad, even as the numbers of Chinese, Indian and Korean students in American universities are rocketing upward. Japan remains one of the most respected countries in the world, according to annual polling done by the British Broadcasting Corporation and others, yet the Japanese ability to shape the international agenda seems to be flagging, giving rise to the concern about its declining profile in the world..

For the United States their uncertainty derives from a public perception that America has lost ground in world opinion in the aftermath of policy shifts following 9/11, and the challenging situation in the Middle East, the sub-prime crisis, and the sliding value of the dollar. The truth is that in much of East Asia, the United States is as popular as ever, but in other parts of the world the American image has come under assault. In response, American think tanks have commissioned studies on "Smart Power" and the State Department has made efforts to enhance its public diplomacy. These changing perceptions of the US role in the world affect Japan-US relations as well.

The ability of the United States and Japan to exercise intellectual leadership in the international community depends also on the health of intellectual exchange between our two countries. A vibrant intellectual relationship between the United States and Japan provides an incubator for new ideas for the international community; it nurtures internationalists who can shape opinion abroad; and it strengthens the foundation of our bilateral partnership. The intellectual relationship in turn draws energy from bilateral cultural linkages; finds new leaders in educational exchanges; and builds on the broad foundation of grass roots cooperation.

CULCON finds a disturbing drift, if not decline, in the intensity of intellectual exchanges

between persons in leadership positions in the two countries, something that had been a positive feature throughout the period of competitive friction. This decline has occurred even while communication at popular levels has increased. CULCON notes this trend with concern.

The New Mission

It is against this backdrop of strong partnership, but fraying intellectual stewardship, which CULCON embarked on a re-examination of the state of Japan-US cultural and educational exchange.

In the preparatory process for this meeting, there has been identified a number of specific fields in Japan-US cultural and educational exchanges. Their activities, their relative strengths and weaknesses have been measured and recommendations are made for improving each field. CULCON issues this report in order to alert professionals and leaders in their respective fields to ways of significantly improving the quality of their activities as part of the greater fabric of the bilateral relationship.

Of immediate and greatest importance to the relationship, to the value of that relationship to the world, and to CULCON is strengthening two areas: to enhance, through developing new generations of articulate and informed leaders, Japan's ability to present itself on the world stage, especially to the United States, in its own voice to "punch at its weight." For the United States, the immediate task at hand for CULCON, and of greatest importance, is to make certain that young Americans across all fields are interested in Japan and able to recognize areas where the United States and Japan can strengthen partnership on the many challenges we face. These concerns are elaborated below in the following policy recommendations.

The year 2008 marks the 150th anniversary of friendship between Japan and the United States that started with the Treaty of Amity and Commerce. This presents an excellent opportunity for reinvigorating and redefining our alliance at all levels. CULCON is also poised to reaffirm its own mission as a pathfinder for the vital intellectual, cultural and educational links that have made our relationship stronger over the past 50 years and will help bind the two countries more closely in a global context. These concrete recommendations for action by government and private citizens are offered in that spirit.

Policy Recommendations

With a clear recognition of the shared values and democratic tradition while respecting differences of their heritages and cultures, CULCON submits the following five recommendations for activities that will have significant impact and positive influence on the Japan-US relationship as a whole:

1. Promote intellectual exchange through increasing opportunities for policy dialog, developing networks of public intellectuals between the two countries and further promoting media exchanges.
2. Continue to foster interest in Japan among Americans and interest in the United States among Japanese through programs that focus on language education and cross-cultural

communications skills for young Japanese and Americans. Invest in language education at an early age, teacher development, and high school and undergraduate exchange.

3. Solidify existing grassroots exchanges and strengthen those in areas of Japan and the United States that have had limited exposure to the other society.
4. Encourage and support networking among the diverse actors involved in Japan-US arts and cultural exchanges in both the non-profit and commercial realms.
5. Consider expansion of exchanges beyond “Culture and Education” in the narrow sense, but focusing on areas which would create opportunities for constructive communication.

In all these areas CULCON encourages capacity building support in addition to specific program support. It is also essential to develop a wider set of stakeholders in exchange activities. CULCON notes with concern that the core institutions of Japan-US exchange, those institutions that have nurtured and developed the lasting personal relationships and deep expertise among intellectuals and leaders in both countries over the past sixty years, are facing difficulties maintaining their operations, due primarily to increased financial uncertainties. These institutions collectively constitute critical infrastructure for maintaining educational, cultural, and intellectual ties between the two nations. Thus CULCON calls on both nations to do their utmost to maintain them. The two governments have vital roles to play in providing core funding. CULCON calls for greater attention to their needs. CULCON makes this call to the governments. CULCON also calls on the private sectors in both countries, especially to the private sector in Japan to include participation and support for these activities as an integral part of their CSR missions. CULCON urges the Government of Japan to encourage private support of exchange activity through providing increased flexibility regarding tax incentives to allow for greater private support of exchange activity through these vital “core” institutions.